

Stefan Mrozewski – Biographical Notes

- 1894 Stefan Mrozewski was born April 12 in Czestochowa, at that time a part of Poland occupied by Russia, son of Franciszek, a modest clerk, and Marianna (nee Heimlich). He was one of eight children, three of whom died in early childhood.
- 1896 The family moves to Sosnowiec, the principal city of the Zagłębie coal mining and industrial region. There, Stefan attends school. His mother, who had herself learnt Polish, taught her children Polish history and the language, both of which were prohibited in the schools.
- 1905 He witnesses worker's strikes demanding better working conditions. Together with his mother, takes part in street demonstrations asking that the Polish language be taught in schools.
- 1910 In the Ossolineum Archives in Wrocław is a postcard dated January 4, 1910, addressed to the Association of Friends of the Fine Arts in Lwów, which was organizing a national exhibition on the theme "The Child and Art", and which reads as follows: "I am sending the Esteemed Gentlemen seven drawings, *Christ, Ruins of Castle in Bedzin, Nostalgia, Castle, Portrait of a Man, Portrait of a Woman, View of a Village with Castle*. I made these drawings at home and on excursions and I wish to inform you gentlemen that I have finished four years at the factory apprenticeship school Sielce and cannot continue because I have to help my parents, whose material situation is difficult. I now draw in my free moments after work. I am 16 years old and am employed in a chemical laboratory. The drawings were exhibited and young Stefan received a Certificate of Commendation.
- 1912 (?) Leaves for the city of Łódź, where he registered for drawing and painting classes at the Jerzy Lehman private evening school, while working as a catalogue designer for an agricultural machinery factory in adjacent Zgierz.
- 1916 Death of his father.
- 1920 Army volunteer during the Polish-Soviet war; is assigned to the cartographic unit in General Władysław Sikorski's Fifth Army.
- 1921 Enters the State School of Decorative Arts in Poznań, but after a few months applies to Kraków (Cracow) Academy of Fine Arts. He is unsuccessful, so he registers at Ludwika and Wilhelm Mehoffer School of Painting and Drawing.

- 1923 Is accepted to the School of Fine Arts in Warsaw where, in the class of Wladyslaw Skocylas, learns various printmaking techniques. His preference goes however to the wood-engraving. Wladyslaw Skocylas (1863-1934) is rightly credited with the revival of wood-engraving in Poland; among his talented students besides Mrozewski, were Tadeusz Kulisiewicz (1899-1987), Tadeusz Cieslewki *fi*ls (1895-1944), Bogna Krasnodebska-Gardowska (1900-19), Ostoja-Chrostowski (1900-1947), Wiktoria Gorynska (1902-1944), Wiktor Podoski (1908-1970), and others.
- 1925 Leaves for Paris where he will be living for the next seven years. He works hard in very difficult material conditions, engraves numerous city scenes and religious compositions, both wood-engravings and etchings.
First one-man exhibition, in Caen.
- 1926 Exhibition at la Gallerie Lachenal in Paris receives good review.
- 1927 Is asked by a Rumanian publisher to make illustrations for Dostoevski's *Brothers Karamazov* and Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*. The fate of these editions is unknown, but there is one print in the Cabinet d'estampes of Bibliotheque Royale Albert ler, in Brussels, which probably is an illustration for Rilke's work.
Exhibits as a guest artist with la Societe de la Gravure originale sur bois. Exhibits at Salon d'Automne.
- 1928 Exhibits at Salon d'Automne, and in the Polish Section of the Exposition Gravure sur bois originale en Europe, at Pavillon Marsan.
- 1929 Illustrations for Marcel Schwob's *Le roi au masque d'or*, commissioned by Colette Weil; for this series, artist receives Sliver Medal at the Tenth National Exhibition in Poznan.
Exhibition at the Salon Scribe in Paris.
Illustrations for Cervantes' *Don Quixote* commissioned by Jakub Morkowicz in Warsaw. First volume is published in 1932. Wood blocks for the second volume are destroyed during the bombardment of the city in September of 1939.
Illustrations for Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* in the Collected Works of the poet published in Warsaw and edited by Manfred Kridi.
Meets his wife Irena Blizinska, she is seventeen and from Warsaw. She had been a piano student, but later starts to paint. They form a proverbial artistic couple and her profound belief in his talent leads to her doing her utmost to ensure that he was able to devote himself to creative work. Many years later when they decide to go to the United States, she takes a variety of jobs, from driving a lunch-wagon, from working in the freezer-storage of a meat-packing factory, to being a domestic help. It is no

- exaggeration to say that she lived only for him and her devotion was returned. They had one son.
- 1930 Exhibition at the Gallerie Bonaparte in Paris, where the artist will be exhibiting for two years.
- 1931 Illustrations (etchings) for Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Une aventure à Sidon*, Editions du Trianon, Szymon Askenazy's *Lettres de Napoléon* (aquatint), S. Londynski's *Lider fun yidishe zeiner* (wood-engravings), published by the author.
Invited to join "Ryt" (Association of Polish Graphic Artists organized by Wladyslaw Skoczylas and Ludwik Gardowski).
A series of illustrations for the Gospel according to St. Luke.
First exhibition in Holland, at the Kunstzaal Buffa in Amsterdam.
- 1932 Purchase of *Le roi au masque d'or*, *Don Quixote*, and twelve other wood-engravings by Bibliotheque Royale Albert Ier. One-man exhibitions at the Gallerie Java in Brussels.
Brief visit to Poland where he works in the region of Kielce, engraving scenes of country life and landscapes. Exhibition at Zacheta Gallery in Warsaw.
- 1933 For the next two years lives in Amsterdam. He moved to Holland on the suggestion of his many Dutch friends and admirers of his talent that he met in Paris. Holland becomes second to Poland where his art is recognized. It is here between September 1933 and June 1934 that he engraves illustrations for Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. Exhibitions at Kunstzall d'Autretsch in The Hague, and Rotterdamsche Kunstkring in Rotterdam.
Is awarded First Prize at the 1st International Woodcut Exhibition in Warsaw.
Mrozewski's wood-engraving shown for the first time in the United States during Polish Art Exhibition held at the Brooklun Museum. This is followed by one-man exhibition which is seen over the next three years in several American Cities. Chicago (Albert Roulier Art Galleries), Philadelphia (Franklin Institute), New Orleans (Delgado Museum), Milwaukee (Layton Art Gallery), Sacramento (California State Library), Kansas City (State College), and Baltimore Museum of Art.
- 1934 *Parzival* is shown at the Kunstszall d'Audretsch in The Hague and receives rare reviews. Engraves a series of city scenes of Amsterdam and Leyden, religious compositions as well as erotica and bookplates.
Exhibition at Kunstchandel Santee Landweer in Amsterdam.
- 1935 Decides to move to London, where he will be living the next two years. Illustrates for the Noneshuch Press *Selected Poems* of Coleridge, and for the Gregynog Press Helen Waddell's poem *The New York City*.
Gregynog Press acquires blocks of *Parzival*, but the projected publication falls through at that time.

- Exhibitions at Redfern Gallery in London, the Ruskin Galleries in Birmingham, and the Waddington Gallery in Dublin, Ireland.
- He undertakes a number of portrait commissions and among his sitters are George Bernard Shaw, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, Herbert George Wells, Lord David Cecil, and Sir Austen Chamberlin. Few of these works are reproduced in *Time and Tide*. Engraves *Tower Bridge*.
- His works are included in the Polnischen Kunstensstellung (Polish Exhibition) touring Germany (Berlin, Munchen, Frankfurt, Dresden, Dusseldorf, Koln, Stettin, and Konigsberg).
- 1936 Series of wood-engravings depicting events from the recent history of Poland; his two stays at Gregynog Hall in Montgomery, Wales, inspire him to engrave *Welsh Fairy-Tale*; portrait of King George the Fifth and *Olympiade*, then and now which receives 2nd prize at the Polish National Olympic Arts Competition and is exhibited during the Berlin Olympiad.
- The Baltimore Museum of Art acquires illustrations for *Don Quixote*.
- 1937 Works in London: portrait of Princess Elizabeth, scenes of the city. Returns to Poland where he works in Warsaw, and in the village of Sudol as guest of his friend Wiktor Ludwik Kielbass, a horticulturist and art collector (his collection of Stefan Mrozewski works and many artists he befriended, and often helped in need, is now at the National Museum in Kielce). Illustrations for Piotr Choynowski's *Opowiadania szlacheckie* (Tales of nobility) for Gebethner & Wolff in Warsaw.
- Grand Prix at Exposition Internationale Arts et Techniques in Paris. Purchase of Parzival illustrations by Hamburg Museum.
- 1938 The City of Warsaw and the Polish Bibliophiles' Society commission illustrations for *Legenda Warszawy*, text by Ewa Szelburg-Zaremba – a history of Warsaw through the centuries. Illustrates Joinville's *Histoire de Saint Louis*, yet to be published.
- His wood-engravings are included in the Polish Exhibition at the Biennale di Venezia.
- Sojourns several months in Italy where he begins working on what he considers to be his principal artistic achievement, one hundred and one illustrations for Dante's *La Divina Commedia*.
- Second Prize at the First National Exhibition of Prints on the theme of hunting, held at the Wielkopolskie Muzeum in Poznan.
- Mrozewski's wood-engravings shown in Canada for the first time during the Polish Prints and Textiles exhibition at the National Gallery.
- 1939 His wood-engravings are shown at the Polish Pavilion during the 1939 World's Fair in New York City.
- Illustrations for Zofia Kossak's *Grod nad jeziorem* (Old town by the lake) published by Gebethner & Wolff.

German invasion surprises Mrozewski in Sudol, where, with his family, he is guest of Wiktor Ludwik Kielbass. Like hundreds of thousands of men he tries to join the army. In spite of the nightmare of German occupation, the next five years are for the artist very productive. He finishes *Inferno*, and produces several portraits and bookplates (which he barter for food), religious compositions, greeting cards, flowers, and architectural landmarks in the region. He is an active member of the underground Armia Krajowa (Home Army), where his graphic skills are put to use.

Member of a clandestine Kolo Milosnikow Exlibrisus i Grafiki (Friends of Bookplates and Graphic Art).

1945 In January the village of Czaryz where the Mrozewski family has lived since 1941 is “liberated” by the Soviet Army. The communist regime in order to gain support of the artistic and intellectual elite provides it with privileges, and the artist is declared one of the “men of merit” and is given a monthly stipend. He is also appointed professor of the graphic arts at the newly organized Srednia Szkola Plastyczna (School of Fine Arts), in the city of Katowice. However, knowing that he will not be able to work freely as an artist in the existing political climate, he illegally leaves Poland for France in mid summer.

In Paris, he illustrates for La Librairie Polonaise a small volume of poems of Cyprian Norwid *Trzy milosci* (Thress Loves).

1946 Illustrations for a collection of anonymous poems drolatique *Les Sonnets du Toubib*, published “aux Editions de la Tournelle, c’est-à-dire nulle part”. Also for the Librairie Polonaise, illustrations for Eugenia Markowa’s *Witraze* (Stained Glasses), a story taking place in mediaeval Poland. Illustrations for Henry Troyat’s *Firebrand, The Life of Dostoevsky*, for Roy Publishers in New York City. His wife is given permission to join him in Paris.

1947 The artist rents a small house in Plessis-Robinson, a suburb of Paris. Trip to London. Pierre Mornand article on Stefan Mrozewski in *Le Courrier graphique* and same as a chapter in *Vingt-deux artistes du livre*. Portrait of Cervantes for the exhibition held at Bibliotheque Nationale, occasion of the four hundred anniversary of writer’s birth.

1948 Departs for Holland where he will work for the next three years, in Amsterdam and in Helvoirt, Northern Brabant, where he is guest of the Reuchlin family. Exhibitions in Hertogenbosh, Kunstzaal Martinus Liernur in The Hague, and Stedelijk van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven. Among wood-engraving of that period are compositions of Biblical and mythological subjects, portraits, a series of scenes from Dutch countryside. Is awarded

First Prize for print *Jesus and Woman from Samaria* at the competition organized by the Nederlandse Bijbelgenootschap in Amsterdam. His works are included in the Polish Graphic Art Exhibition at the Amsterdam Gemeentemuseum.

Takes part in the exhibition of religious art in Rome as part of celebrations of the Anno Santo; he is invited by his Dutch colleagues to exhibit in their company.

Two men exhibition (with printmaker and painter Konstany Brandel) at the Club des Relations intellectuelles internationales in Paris.

1949 Illustrations for *La Belle et la bête* by Madame de Villeneuve, published by Le Cercle Grollier in Paris.

Is commissioned by N.V. Phillips's Gloeilampenfabrieken in Eindhoven to produce several wooden-engravings of people at work.

1950 Exhibitions at Kunsthandel Santee Landweer in Amsterdam, and Kunsthandel Martinus Liernur in The Hague.

Exhibition at Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York.

1951 Illustrations for the medieval morality play *Elckerlijc* (Everyman), for De Roos in Utrecht. One of the five artists who was asked to make a composition on the theme of the unicorn (other artists were John Buckland Wright, Valentin le Campion, Dirk van Geider, and Mark Severin), with an introduction by C.J. Asselbergs. This portfolio titled *Eenhoorn*, was also published by De Roos.

Exhibition at Butler Art Institute in Youngstown, Ohio

Artist returns to Paris. Decides to emigrate to the United States. On Christmas Day 1951, Stefan Mrozewski and his family enter New York City harbour on a Liberty troops transport ship, which carried 1,319 displaced persons from Central and Eastern Europe. After knocking in vain at the doors of many publishers and galleries, the artist sees his dream of pursuing the career as a book illustrator in the United States vanish rapidly. In spite of this painful setback, he finds New York to be a most fascinating place, and recorded his impressions in many drawings and watercolours. The first commission he receives is from the Kosciuszko Foundation which asks him to make two wood-engravings depicting childhood years of Marcellina Sembrych-Kochanska, a noted American opera singer of Polish descent. He also produces a number of greeting cards for Christmas and New Year.

1952 Participates in the National Exhibition of Prints held at the Library of Congress in 1952, and again in 1953. Each time, one wood-engraving is purchased for the permanent collection.

In September the artist leaves New York City for California where he is awarded a fellowship at the Huntington Hartford

- Foundation in Pacific Palisades. The California segment of Stefan Mrozewski's life is productive as the previous years in Europe. He continues to make wood-engravings, but also starts again to make etchings, and rediscovered pastels to draw several landscapes, flowers, and portraits.
- 1953 Lives in North Hollywood and then settles in Baldwin Park. Participates in the Second National Exhibition of Prints organized by the University of Southern California and the Printmakers of Southern California. Receives the Graphic Art Prize at the 56th Annual Exhibition of Washington Water Color Club, Washington, D.C. Two men exhibition (with Feliks Topolski) at the Butler Art Institute in Youngstown, Ohio.
- 1954 In August, first trip to Canada, to Montreal and the Laurentians. Takes part in the 38th Annual Exhibition of the Society of American Artists held at Kennedy Galleries in New York City.
- 1955 Illustrations for John Hershey's novel *The Wall*. The sponsor who commissioned the illustrations does not approve one of them and requests that it be replaced. When the artist refuses to comply, the projected edition was cancelled. Mrozewski later issues these illustrations himself under the title *The Ghetto of Warsaw*. Undertakes illustrations for Adam Mickiewicz's poems *Ballady i Romanse*.
- 1956 Participates in the 23rd Annual Exhibition of the Miniature Painters, Sculptors, and Gravers Society of Washington, D.C.
- 1957 Paints frescoes and decorates St. Patrick Church in Canutillo, Texas.
- 1958 Paints a fresco for the Our Lady of Czestochowa Polish Parish in Los Angeles. The painting is destroyed in 1983.
- 1959 Exhibition at the Long Beach Museum of Art.
- 1961 Resident artist at Villa Montalvo, Saratoga, California.
- 1962 Exhibition at Polish Museum in Chicago.
- For the second time is awarded residence fellowship at Huntington Hartford Foundation.
- Exhibition of his engravings, paintings, mosaics, and sculptures in de Saisset Art Gallery at Santa Clara University, Santa Clara. A series of portraits, wood-engravings, of Saints and Blessed of Poland. This album is presented by a delegation of Polish clergy in the United States to newly elected Pope Paul VI on July 3rd 1963.
- 1963 The artist moves from Monte Sereno to Walnut Creek.
- 1964 Polish community in California organizes Stefan Mrozewski's Golden Jubilee and exhibition in Oakland. Exhibition at the University of California in Berkeley.
- Purchase by the National Gallery in Ottawa of wood-engraving *Church in Minichow*, 1941.
- 1965 Exhibition of paintings at Oakland Jewish Community Center.

- Illustrations for Alicja Pomian-Pozerska' poems *Najlonowe skrzydla* (Wings of nylon), published in London at Oficyna Poetow i Malarzy.
- Moves from Monte Sereno fo Walnut Creek. ??? see **1963 above**
- 1966 Album *Poloniae Christianae Polonia* in commemoration of Millenium Christanity in Poland is awarded Second Prize in the competition for the postage stamp commemorating the Millenium, and organized by the United States Post Office.
The Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum in Oakland publishes a popular edition of *Ghetto of Warsaw*.
Illustrations for *Madonna poetow*, an anthology of Polish poetry dedicated to the Virgin Mary, compiled by Zdzislaw Peszkowski, is published in London at Oficyna Poetow i Malarzy.
- 1967 Exhibition at La Galerie d'Art de l'Universite de Sherbrooke, in Sherbrooke, Quebec, and Windsor University, Windsor, Ontario.
Receives Jurzykowski Foundation of New York Award.
- 1968 Visits Poland for the first time since he left that country in 1945. National Museum in Warsaw, which has a large number of his prints, organizes a show for that occasion. Before returning to the United States, via Canada, he visits Austria, Greece, Italy, and France. This trip is documented by many drawings.
Exhibition at the University de Moncton, Moncton, New Brunswick.
- 1971 Artist completes the last illustration for the Divine Comedy, thus finishing, after 32 years, a series of 101 large size wood-engravings. Not finding a publisher who will publish it, Stefan and Irena Mrozewski decide to publish it themselves. Of the projected fifty sets, they print fewer than twenty.
- 1974 Exhibition of prints at the Laurentian University Museum and Arts Center, Sudbury, Ontario.
Illustrations for Jozef Ignacy Kraszewski *Historia o Krolewiczu Ruminanku I Siedmiu Krolewnach* (A Story about Prince Rumaniek and Seven Princesses), woodcuts, published in Warsaw by Panstwowy instytut Wydawniczy.
- 1975 In June and July, Stefan and Irena Mrozewski together visit family in Sudbury for the last time. They also spend some time in the Laurentians, at Lac Cornu near St. Adolphe de Howard.
After the return to Walnut Creek, the artist continues to work on a series of portraits of well known Poles, or distinguished Americans of Polish descent, such as pianist and statesman Jozef Ignacy Paderewski, or dramatic actress Helena Modjeska (Modrzejewska).
At the beginning of September the artist falls ill and dies on the seventh of that month. Irena Mrozewska dies in 1983, and both are resting in the Our Lady of Czestochowa Cemetery in Doylestowne, Pennsylvania. Their tombstone bears, in Polish,

the inscription: "They lived for Art and Country".
In the month of November the University of San Francisco
presents the Art of Stefan Mrozewski Memorial Exhibition.